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H-Bomb Scientists Suspected of Leaks

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Government nuclear weapons experts suspect that scientists at their own Argonne and Livermore national laboratories leaked classified secrets to authors of stories on the hydrogen bomb that the government tried to suppress, according to sources.

Though the writers insist they based their articles on information available to the public, Energy Department officials feel they were aided by sympathetic scientists at the government laboratories, the sources said. The Justice Department has been asked to determine whether anyone should be prosecuted under the criminal sections of the Atomic Energy Act for divulging the crucial concepts of the H-bomb.

The government dropped its effort to stop the Progressive magazine from publishing an article by Howard Morland on Monday. This came a day after the Madison (Wis.) Press Connection printed a letter, by Charles Hansen, which disclosed the key principles for making an H-bomb, a Justice Department spokesman said.

Energy Department officials seem more intent on finding those who might have leaked classified information than in prosecuting the Madison newspaper for finally printing the Hansen letter. Justice lawyers haven't decided yet whether the case is worth pursuing, officials there said yesterday.

The government nuclear experts were said to be particularly upset by what they believe were leaks from the government's secret filings in the Progressive case that they believe were used in Hansen's letter, the sources said.

One source said Energy Department officials found "significant language similarities" between sections of the

government briefs and parts of the 18-page Hansen letter.

It was not clear why scientists from Argonne and Livermore are the subject of suspicion, though a few nuclear experts from those labs had permission to see the secret government filings while aiding defense lawyers preparing the Progressive's case.

Mark H. Lynch and Paul L. Friedman, attorneys for the Progressive, said they were disturbed by the government's decision to begin even a preliminary criminal inquiry. They said they did not violate the court's protective order and Lynch added he was sure the scientists who assisted them "wouldn't be that foolish."

They noted that the defendants, Morland and Progressive editors Erwin Knoll and Samuel Day Jr., did not have access to the government's secret court filings.

Some government nuclear experts have believed from the beginning that both Morland and Hansen had help in preparing their articles.

In its public brief before the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago the government said: "The evidence suggests that Morland was able to write accurately about the H-bomb secret only because he had significant guidance by a person or persons with access to classified material."

Morland interviewed several government scientists during his research on the article, with the permission of the Energy Department. But the government moved to block publication of the story in March, when Progressive editors submitted it for approval.

Government suspicions were heightened in late April and early May when a Milwaukee Sentinel reporter, Joe Manning, wrote stories about the H-bomb from materials he said he found on library shelves, the sources said. The articles repeated some of the same mistakes Morland made in his piece, sources said.

Trueman Farris, managing editor of the Sentinel, said in a phone interview yesterday that Manning didn't talk to anyone with a classified clearance in preparing his stories. "If there were mistakes that paralleled Mor-

land, it could be because they used the same public materials," Farris said.

Hansen, a computer programmer from Mountain View, Calif., said he couldn't comment about the government's leak suspicions because his lawyer told him not to discuss the case.

The government's concern about suspected leaks is apparent in its motion to dismiss the preliminary injunction against the Progressive. In that motion, Justice lawyers specifically ask that the district court be allowed to take "appropriate action to protect the in camera [secret] materials."

"Some material filed in camera by the United States is more sensitive than the Morland article," the government lawyers said. "This material was submitted by the government in reliance upon the assurance of confidentiality provided by its in camera treatment."

Progressive attorney Friedman said the scope of the protective order and the government's reference to a preliminary inquiry for possible criminal violations of the Atomic Energy Act would have a "chilling effect" on future writers. "It could lead to self-censorship and the victory we have achieved would be eliminated," he said.

The Progressive lawyers said they feel the constitutionality of the Atomic Energy Act can be challenged because its provisions are too loosely defined. Deputy Assistant Attorney General Robert L. Keuch, an expert on espionage cases, said the act has been used in only one criminal prosecution and that was a classic spy case in 1964.

Some department lawyers believe any criminal case stemming from the H-bomb disclosures would be flawed because the government has acknowledged that many of the same secrets had been disclosed by inadvertent declassifications.